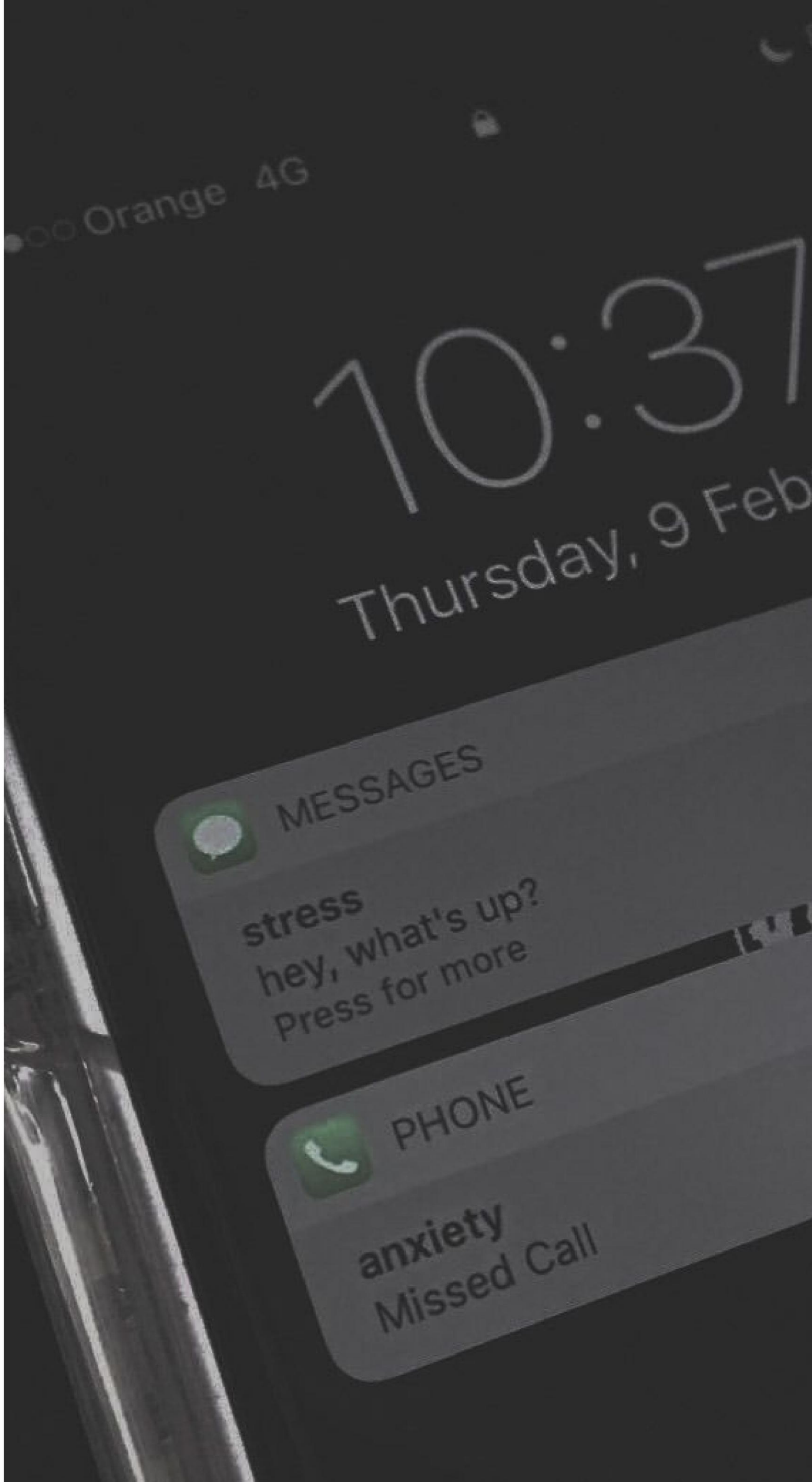


# Matt Kennon Has His Regrets



**Ficbunny**

## Homework Help

When May had found out he was Spider-man she'd been furious, but after "giving it a little thought," as she put it, she figured she couldn't stop him if she wanted to. She could, however, make sure he was, "taking care of himself," also her words. This meant no missing class, finishing his homework, catching at least five hours of sleep, and he'd honestly ate more in the last week than he had in his entire lifetime.

These rules are how he found himself working on his physics homework at midnight.

If he finished right then he could still get a couple hours of Spider-manning in. The problem was he was had been stuck on the same question for the last hour. Okay, that was exaggerating it had probably only been like five minutes and he really isn't trying, but can you honestly say you could focus on homework when you could be swinging from buildings and fighting crime?

Finally giving up Peter flopped down onto his bed with a groan. He was seriously considering just going out now and finishing up in the morning, but then either Aunt May would find out and he wouldn't be going anywhere at any time for a week, or he'd lie to her and feel extremely guilty.

With a sigh he rolled onto his stomach and used his webs to pull his binder over to him.

Bad idea. As he jerked it across the room his notes scattered everywhere littering the floor between his desk and bed. Unable to contain the frustrated scream that was bound to follow he buried his head in his pillow and let loose.

About that time May knocked on his door, "Everything okay in there?"

"Yeah, everything's great." It was a tad sarcastic and had he not had a crappy day he might have felt bad.

To Aunt May's credit, she knew it was better to just let him be, "Alright then, If you need anything you know where I'll be."

He replied with an earnest, "Thanks," before groaning and flipping himself up off his bed to gather his notes in what he hoped was the right order.

After he'd gathered all the loose papers and shoved them back into the beat up folder that was labeled with a crappy pun his 8th-grade self found hilarious he hopped back on his bed and reread the question while picking at the webbing that he was unable to pull off the paper.

*A particle is moving around in a circle and its position is given in polar coordinates as  $x = R\cos\theta$ , and  $y = R\sin\theta$ , where  $R$  is the radius of the circle, and  $\theta$  is in radians. From these equations derive the equation for centripetal acceleration.*

Chewing idly on his bottom lip he started writing,

$$dx/dt = -R\cos\theta(d\theta/dt)$$

...or was it,  $dx/dt = -R\sin\theta(d\theta/dt)$

Another sigh and he was erasing yet again. It was only one problem, surely it could wait. He could ask his teacher for help and say he couldn't figure it out. It wouldn't necessarily be lying.

He pushed himself up into a sitting position and pulled his phone out from beneath his pile of blankets. With it buried he must not have felt it vibrate because he had two texts.

He opened the first one,

*Michelle;*

*Don't know what's been going on with you lately, but you better be at practice.*

After sending her a quick reassurance that he wouldn't miss it he opened the next one,

*Mr. Stark;*

*Happy will pick you up after school tomorrow. Need to make some adjustments to the suit.*

Peter texted back,

*Can you tell him to be two hours late??*

When an immediate reply didn't come Peter added,

*I have Decathlon practice. :/*

Tossing his phone to the end of the bed he went back to staring at the question and tapping his pencil against his thigh.

It didn't take long before he was no longer thinking about the problem but concentrating on tapping out the rhythm to Back in Black. He'd made it to the guitar solo when his phone buzzed.

Mr. Stark had texted back,

*Sure thing kid. You want anything else? Maybe a pizza?*

Peter rolled his eyes, but knowing Mr. Stark was being sarcastic didn't make the offer any less appealing.

Actually... He glanced back down at his homework and an idea had formed. Mr. Stark was a genius, and Peter would only ask him one question.

Knowing if he texted it would be ignored, Peter dialed Stark's number,

Tony answered with a gruff, "*You know I was joking right kid? I'm not really going to order you a pizza.*"

Shaking his head despite Stark not being able to see him he answered, "I know. I was hoping you could help me with something else." There was a beat of silence and Peter began rambling, "I mean, I know you're busy and stuff, but I already read through half the textbook and tried Google, then you texted back so I knew you were awake and I just thought you're like the smartest person I know so if anyone could help it'd be you and..."

*"Slow down kid. What are you wanting help with? If you screwed up the suit so help me..."*

Peter cut him off, "No, no nothing like that I just need some..." He sighed and prepared himself for the inevitable jokes and the very real possibility of being hung up on, "homeworkhelp."



The teen had rushed through it in a small voice so of course Tony couldn't understand,

*"What was that?"*

Another sigh, "Homework help, I was hoping you could answer a problem for me."

*"Tell me you're kidding."*

"It's not long I promise. I just need to know what the equation of centripetal acceleration is if the polar coordinates are  $x = R\cos\theta$  and  $y = R\sin\theta$ ."

*"I'm not here to be your damn tutor Peter. If you need help go to Slader or call one of your friends."*

Peter scrubbed a hand over his face and answered, "Right, sorry Mr. Stark."

*"I'll see you tomorrow after your whatever practice."*

Sounding defeated even to his own ears Peter replied, "Okay."

*"Oh and kid?"*

"Yeah?"

*" $d^2x/dt^2 = -R\omega^2$ "*

Before Peter could even say thanks Tony had hung up and was shaking his head.

The billionaire took one last look at the Chicago Conference for the Wealthy invitation that he'd used as scrap paper to solve the kid's problem before balling it up and tossing it towards the nearest trash can.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y. call Sofie Welsh and tell her I misplaced my invitation... and send the kid a pizza.”

## Superheroes don't get Paid

It had been a busy night. Which was weird because it was a Monday, and who plans a crime for Monday. Well, apparently a lot of people, but still, it seemed weird. Plus, they were weird crimes. A few guys broke into a bank without any kind of equipment. They used a brick to bust out a door and walked in to do nothing.

After taking them out Peter caught a guy walking down the street setting off car alarms. Not breaking into them, just shaking them until the alarm went off. He webbed him up and moved on to a guy who was using a taco shop as target practice. It was just one weird thing after another. They were even lined up from one road to the neighboring one. Peter suspected it was some kind of trap, but he couldn't just not stop the guy who was streaking through the streets.

Well, actually that was a bad example he probably should've let that guy be. Bleh! He would be omitting that from his report to Happy.

He found a guy who was walking a tiger down the sidewalk like it was a dog. Except it wasn't a dog it was a FREAKIN' TIGER. That had been admittedly awesome. Especially since when he caught up to the person walking it he'd let him pet it. After explaining that no it wasn't legal to walk a cat big enough to eat a person down the streets of New York, and yes he may have the paperwork to own said cat but still could be charged with public endangerment the guy revealed that he'd been paid near 20 grand to walk the tiger around the block a few times and that was it.

Peter really didn't know what to do with the tiger guy and ended up letting him go if he promised to never commit a crime for an insane amount of cash promised by a stranger he met online. Maybe not his best idea, but the guy was pretty nice and Peter had told Karen to remind him to check in on the dude.

After that whole incident the weird pretty much stopped. Wandering around a bit he didn't really find anything out of the ordinary. That is until he spotted another weird guy walking right down the middle of the road on four metal appendages laughing maniacally.

Peter flipped in and called out nervously, "Hey bud! No offense or anything, but the Spider theme is kinda my thing."

The massive legs turned the man's body towards him, "Ah, there are many Spider-men in the multiverse, and I will not insult myself by association. No, I am Doctor Otto Octavius, and you should remove yourself from my path or I will squash you like the bug that you are."

"Is there some kind of Spidey bashing forum you baddies use for insults cause I've heard that one about six times today." At this time a giant leg swung at him and he backflipped out of the way easily, "If you're gonna be like that then I don't think we can be friends." Spidey crossed his arms in a petulant gesture.

This caused Otto to come at him with more of a vengeance swinging his arms at him in rapid succession. Peter barely had time to dodge one before another came at him. He dodged doing a twist between two arms and landed as another came at him. Jumping up and out of the way he was mid-air and unable to move as the fourth arm came directly for his chest.

As it pulled him towards Otto, Spidey quipped, "Well okay if it means that much to you, but I'm going to need a cool nickname to put you in my contacts under. How about Alessandra Ambrosio... Get it cause you're all legs?" When all the mad doctor did was tighten his mechanical grip Peter added, "No you're right, too long, and just between me and you, I don't think you have the smile for it."

Otto seemed distracted by Peter's ramble so the teen continued as he slowly started wrapping webbing around the appendage, "What about Dong Tao? You know actually, that's kind of offensive to those chickens... Ooh ooh, I got it Doctor Octopus! Because you're a doctor whose name is Octavius. Yep, that's the one!" With his final exclamation he pried the claws from around his body and flipped out of the man's grip. Using the webbing he had attached to the arm earlier he stuck the appendage to the road.

Flipping back out of the doctor's now shortened reach Peter continued with his earlier ramble, "Still needs to be shortened though. Now I'm thinkin' Doc Ock, of course, there are other options, but we probably need to keep it kid friendly."

Doc Ock had twisted the stuck limb at an odd angle in order to twist around in an effort to reach Peter. He was straining against the pull of the leg when with a groan and some sparks the whole appendage broke off where it was attached to the man's back.

The doctor let out a shout as he wobbled trying to maintain balance and Peter webbing his way up to stick to the side of a building commented, "Woah there big guy! If you don't like the name I'm sure we can compromise."

Now in control of his movements, the doctor replied with a laugh, "No, I'm actually quite fond of that name, suits me I think. What I'm not fond of is letting a runt ruin three years and a million dollars worth of planning..."

Peter interjected, "A million... Wait you were the one paying people to walk tigers around the block?"

"Among other things," Doc Ock focused his creepy red goggles on Spider-man's lenses, "Tell you what *Spider-man* you let me pass and I'll pay you five grand."

Shaking his head Peter jumped off the wall and onto a light post. He shot webbing at another one of the doctor's arms and copying his move from earlier jumped off the light post and stuck it to the ground. When Doc Ock swung himself at the teen the limb broke off just like the last one.

Spidey webbed the last two legs to the ground at the same time while he quipped, "Sorry Doc, but I don't take cash. Also, I feel a little cheated because tiger guy got 20 grand, but semantics I guess." He finished webbing the guy up and hopped up on the nearest roof before calling out, "Say hi to the police for me," and web-slinging away.

Peter didn't go far, he wanted to keep the doctor in sight just in case, before plopping down on the edge of an apartment complex. Feet dangling over the darkening city below Peter pulled off his mask and retrieved his phone. Having Karen call would have been easier, but, and he would never tell Mr. Stark this, the mask was kind of suffocating.

After defeating the Vulture, Mr. Stark had given Peter his personal number. The teen knew he was still supposed to call Happy with his reports, but it always seemed more gratifying to tell Mr. Stark himself. Plus, Mr. Stark actually answered when he called, unlike Happy.

Despite what he just said he had to call Stark twice before he answered, "*You know usually when*

*someone doesn't answer the first time it means they don't wanna talk."*

Feeling chastised Peter replied, "Sorry Mr. Stark, I just have a question."

Peter watched the police arrive to take Doc Ock away as Tony answered with, *"If this is about homework I will block your number."*

Rushing to his own defense Peter appeased, "No! No this isn't about homework, thank you for that though. I just...um...Well, hypothetically speaking, if someone were to offer me money, would it be okay to take it?"

*"Superheroes don't get paid kid."*

"I know that, I do, and of course in this situation I would never, but just for like, future reference or something, is that okay? Usually I wouldn't even be considering it, but, and Aunt May would never tell me this, honestly though it's not hard to tell the heat's been out and who *wants* leftover meatloaf three nights in a row, I think we're a little tight on cash you know, so if someone were to offer, I just think that it'd be..."

Knowing that Peter could talk all night Tony cut in trying to understand the kid's rambling, *"Did someone offer you money Peter?"*

"Well... Yeah, but I think he's a pretty bad dude so I wouldn't have taken it, I was just curious for future reference I guess."

*"Alright kid listen, this is more of a moral thing than a have someone tell you the answer thing. Me, money's never been a problem, so I've never had a reason to accept it. You, well if you help someone and then they offer and you need the cash, no one is going to think any less of you if you take it. Maybe avoid the 'bad dudes' though."*

"Of course. Thank you, Mr. Stark."

*"Yeah, see you around kid."*

Nervously Peter hurried, “Actually there’s one more thing.”

Tony sighed before asking, “*What is it?*”

“If I were to, I don’t know,” Peter tried to make himself sound nonchalant, “bump into a tiger or something...”

“*You ‘bumped’ into a tiger?*”

“It’s been a crazy night.”

“*Tigers can kill people Peter.*”

Nodding Peter replied, “Yeah I was afraid you say that. Bye, Mr. Stark”

“*See ya kid, and try not to get eaten.*”

“You got it.”

Shaking his head Tony leaned back in his seat and went over what Peter had said.

“F.R.I.D.A.Y.?”

“*Yes sir?*”

“Play the footage from the Spider-man suit.”

“*Of course sir. Anything else?*”



Tony debated it a bit as he watched Peter climb out his bedroom window humming the Spider-man theme song some Youtuber had come up with. He couldn't help the snort that accompanied the thought that it was probably Peter.

Shaking his head he finally answered F.R.I.D.A.Y., "Yeah, have someone bring me my checkbook. I think it's time I start paying my interns."

*"Absolutely sir."*

## Peter needs some advice

Peter paced around his room desperately trying to come up with any idea what to do. How could he be so *stupid*? He'd just blurted it out right in the middle of the lunch room, no plans on what to do next.

Running his hands through his hair he looked down at the worn carpet in his bedroom and sighed, "Mr. Stark is going to kill me." Regardless he grabbed his phone off its spot on his desk and dialed his number.

*"What is it this time?"*

"First I just want to ask that you not hang up on me."

*"No promises, and kid just so you know friendly neighborhood Spider-men don't take on people who belong in a psych ward when they have metal legs coming out of their back that could literally rip you in half."*

"Noted, but I need some advice."

*"If this is about..."*

"It isn't about homework, or money, but you still probably won't like it."

*"Great, so why don't you save us both the trouble and call someone else."*

Peter actually had a pretty decent answer to that question but knew if he started gushing about how much he looked up to Mr. Stark the call would be ended and he wouldn't get the advice he needed. Instead he opted to just ignore the question and ask his own, "So, I kinda asked this girl out, and I really like her and don't want to screw up, so I have no idea where to take her, and then I was thinking you've..." *been on a lot of dates*. Peter cut himself off before he could finish that sentence, he figured that might be a tad offensive. Clearing his throat and hoping Mr. Stark wouldn't know where he was going with that, Peter finished lamely, "Uh, I thought you could help?"

Silence echoed across the line and Peter fought the urge to fill it with useless rambling. Saying it out loud though his nervousness was turning into excitement and he couldn't help but continue, "I don't need like kissing advice or anything gross like that I just... I don't know where to go." When Tony still hadn't said anything Peter questioned, "Mr. Stark?"

He was met with a robotic, *"You're call has been disconnected."*

Tossing his phone onto his unmade bed he flopped down into his desk chair mumbling, "Great."

Meanwhile Tony was shaking his head staring at his own phone. He seriously couldn't come up with why, of all people, the kid would be asking him for advice. Of course, his subconscious was providing multiple reasons, all equally unsettling and flattering at the same time.

Tucking his phone away he slumped into the seat of the jet that was flying him out to Chicago.

Their conversation drifted through his mind. "I really like her... thought you could help." What gave him the right to help the kid with this stuff? *He did ask you*. Yeah, well he should've asked someone else. *In case you didn't notice he's severely lacking in the father figures department*.

Tony scrubbed a hand over his face. Knowing he was fighting a losing battle, Tony pulled out his phone and started texting the kid,

*Take her to Coney Island. Keep your phone on vibrate, don't check it unless it's an emergency, take her on the ferris wheel, win her a stuffed bear, kiss her on her doorstep, but for the love of God do not wear one of your geeky science tees.*

Peter was spinning the chair back in forth while reading the reviews for every restaurant that he

could afford when his phone buzzed. Thinking it was MJ he dove onto his bed and quickly opened the text. He was only slightly disappointed to find out it was Mr. Stark.

After reading over the text he glanced down at his 'Forget Lab Safety I want Superpowers' T-shirt and immediately pulled it off. Looking through his closet he decided to just go with a plain grey tee and pulled it on. After okaying himself in the mirror, not that he really knew what he was looking for, he'd honestly thought he had looked fine in the first place, Peter sat back down in his chair and started spinning in slow circles.

Looking around his room he tried to come up with something to do. He still had two hours before he supposed to meet Michelle and he was already ready to go. His eyes settled on his phone and he decided to call Ned and see if he wanted to work on rebuilding their lego death star.

Rolling his chair over to where his phone was sitting on his bed Peter had just picked it up when it vibrated signaling someone had texted him.

*Mr. Stark;*

*Have fun tonight kid, you deserve it*

Smiling Peter leaned back in the chair. Which was great and all except the chair wasn't exactly meant to be leaned back in and he went tumbling to the floor. On the way down his shirt caught the arm of the seat and ripped up the side, and now that he's laying there, is that a mustard stain on his jeans, also maybe converse he got from a dumpster aren't the best shoes for a date.

Turns out he wasn't so ready after all.

## Just an Inch Farther

The final bell had just rung and Peter was dragging Ned down the hallways towards an isolated bathroom that kids only used when they wanted to smoke or uh... well, you get point.

Ned watched as his best friend pushed open the stalls to make sure no one was in there while he asked, "What's up dude? Not that I'm complaining, but my mom will literally kill me if I miss the bus again today."

Turning to face Ned, Peter explained, "It'll only take a second." He pulled the Spidey suit from his backpack to show his friend and asked, "You think you can fix this?"

Furrowing his eyebrows Ned plucked the suit from Peter's hands, and exclaimed, "Dude!" as he stuck his finger through a small hole a little to the left of the center of the suit's chest.

"I know. I spent hours trying to fix it, but the bullet must have severed an important wire to the power systems. The whole thing just powered down."

"Bullet? I thought you could, like, dodge those or something."

"Yeah, I wasn't expecting it to ricochet back at me. On the bright side that must've slowed it down enough the suit could catch it. Still hurt like a b though."

Ned eyed his friend with concern, "Are you, you know..." He gestured vaguely towards Peter.

“I’m fine Ned, I just need the suit working.”

After examining the suit more carefully Ned shook his head, “Sorry man, there’s just too much damage. It completely severed like three different sets of wires. Even if we could splice them back together, we’re not going to find the right stuff in tech that’s been tossed in the dumpster.” Handing the suit back to Peter, he added, “Why don’t you just have Stark fix it?”

Shaking his head, Peter replied, “No way, he would freak if he knew I got shot.”

“I don’t know then dude. I gotta go though, my grandma’s making her lasagna tonight and there is *no* way I’m gonna miss that.”

Nodding in understanding (His grandma could make a rat taste like heaven if she wanted,) Peter watched Ned leave. Before the door could swing back shut though Peter hollered after him, “Save me a piece?!”

The answering, “Always do!” came immediately, and then Ned was gone.

Peter smiled and looked down at his suit. The hole was so small, it should have been an easy fix. But no, stupid Parker luck strikes again. Seriously, what is the likeliness that a bullet ricochets right towards his heart, and it just so happens that’s where three important wires run through.

Pulling his phone out of his back pocket, the teen scrolled through his contacts until he found Mr. Stark. Finger hovering over his name, Peter thought back to an earlier call, *‘If you screwed up the suit so help me...’*

Taking a deep breath he dialed and listened to the familiar ringing.

He was slightly unprepared for Mr. Stark to answer cheerfully after only the second ring, “*Hey kid, I was just about to call you. I’ve got some upgrades for your suit I was hoping we could discuss.*”

“Oh, uh, yeah, sounds... sounds good.”

Concern leaking into his voice, Tony questioned, *“Everything okay there Peter?”*

The teen answered too fast and too loud, “Yeah! Yeah, everything’s fine. I just... I uh...” Peter scrubbed a hand down his face before continuing, “I did some damage to the suit.”

*“You did some damage to the suit?”* Stark parroted.

Falling into his rambling like he always seems to do when he’s nervous, Peter explained, “Yeah, just a little though. Really it should be easy to fix, but I tried and couldn’t figure it out, and Ned’s having a Garfield moment, so he couldn’t fix it either, but of course, if you’re too busy...”

*“I’m going to stop you right there kid. First off, that’s a multi-million dollar suit and I’d rather you not try to fix it with parts from a 70’s microwave. Secondly, I’ve got upgrades for your suit, while I install those I’ll repair the damage. No big deal.”*

“Okay...” Peter trailed off, but couldn’t help but asking, “What has you in such a good mood?”

*“Don’t worry about it kid.”* There was a loud crash in the background followed by distinct shouting and a curse from Tony, *“Shit, I gotta go do damage control. Skype me when you get home from school, we’ll talk about those upgrades and you can show me how much damage you managed to do. Might want to wear the mask though, I have visitors.”*

“Oh, alright Mr. Stark I’ll... wait what.” But before he could protest the call had already been ended.

Peter groaned as he stuffed the suit back into his backpack. He was really hoping he could just send the suit over and not have to be where Mr. Stark could yell at him when he saw it.

*‘Too late now,’* Peter thought as he began his very slow trek home.

Too soon he was walking through the apartment door and greeting his aunt.

“Hey, Aunt May.”



She grabbed the remote to turn down the tv before replying, “Hey, Peter. How was school?”

Walking into the kitchen, Peter shrugged and answered, “The usual.”

“That bad huh?”

He opened the fridge and pulled out a bottle of water, “Well, on the bright side, I don’t think I heard Penis Parker all day. Peter Pecker however, made multiple appearances, along with some others I probably shouldn’t say.”

“Oh, Peter, I’m so sorry. You wanna watch the Bachelor with me?”

“As much as I love that show,” he really, *really*, didn’t, “Mr. Stark wanted me to call him.”

“Alright then, if you change your mind you know where I’ll be.”

Peter nodded and headed towards his room, “Thanks, May.”

Pushing his door shut, Peter pulled out his suit and tossed his backpack down.

Taking one more look at the bullet hole the teen had hoped some miraculous way of fixing it would come to him. No such luck.

The teen sighed and, remembering Mr. Stark’s earlier suggestion, pulled on his mask. It was weird having it on when the systems weren’t working. The lens were stuck in their earlier position and were filtering out too much light making it hard for Peter to see.

Stumbling over to his window he pulled open the blinds and let out a small yelp at the offending brightness. He took a few clumsy steps backward and reached up to rub his temples, trying to fend off the sensory overload.

When he was no longer hearing the heartbeats of everyone in the building, he adjusted the blinds to let in the right amount of light and plopped down in his desk chair. Man, he really wished his suit was working right.

Sighing he pulled up Skype and called Mr. Stark. As soon as he answered Peter realized what had put him in such a good mood and why Peter had to wear his mask.

In the background, all piled up on one couch was the Avengers. Clint and Natasha were both perched on the back of the couch, while Steve, Sam, Wanda, and Thor were crammed on the cushions. This left Bruce sitting crisscross on the floor and Vision hovering next to them all. Peter could only see a piece of the tv screen, but it looked like they were playing Mario Kart.

“Hey, Mr. Stark!”

*“Hey, kid, so let’s see it.”*

Rubbing the back of his neck sheepishly he asked, “See what?” even though he knew the answer.

*“The suit. Let’s see what kind of damage you managed to do.”*

“Oh, I thought... I um I thought you wanted to go over upgrades and stuff first.”

*“Eh, that might take a while. I want to do this before I forget,”* He glanced over his shoulders to glare at the Avengers and let his voice rise in order to be heard, *“Or one of these heathens break something else.”* Peter laughed as a pillow came flying and Tony said, *“I’d be careful if I was you, Barton. Those pillows cost more than everything you own combined.”* Tony turned back to face him with an expectant look, *“So?”*

“I, I’d um, I’d rather we...” Peter cut off his stutters with a sigh. He might as well just get this over with now. It’s just Mr. Stark, aka Iron Man, aka his idol since forever, along with the rest of the Avengers that he was about to get yelled at in front of. Yeah, no big deal. He shook his head, “Yeah, okay,” and grabbed the suit.

Peter carefully unfolded it so that Tony could clearly see what had happened. Watching shock spread across Stark’s features Peter explained lamely, “The, um, the whole suit shut down afterward. I almost never figured out a way to get it off.”

Apparently forgetting about his guests, Tony addressed him with forced calm, *"Peter, please tell me that's not a bullet hole."*

"It's, um..." Peter glanced at the Avengers who were all watching with interest now. Giving a spry wave he continued, "It's not a bullet hole."

Shaking his head Tony asked still keeping himself in check, *"Mmhm, and where exactly did this bullet hit you at?"*

Slowly bringing his hand up, Peter pointed at the spot above his heart.

Now losing control Tony's voice rose to shouting level, *"Dammit, Peter. How could you be so reckless as to get shot in the heart."*

"To be fair I didn't really get shot in the heart. The suit caught it." Peter defended.

*"Well, I guess now we know bulletproof needs to go to the top of the upgrade list."*

"That's really not necessary Mr. Stark. It was just this one time..."

*"It only takes once for something really bad to happen Peter."*

"I know that, I do, it's just..."

Tony cut him off, *"Just nothing. What if that bullet had gone just an inch farther. Then what would I do?"*

Trying to lighten the mood Peter joked, "Hire Fall Out Boy to play at my funeral?"

*"That's not funny."*

“It was a little funny,” At Mr. Stark’s glare he continued, “Okay you’re right. I’m sorry, Mr. Stark.”

Scrubbing a hand over his face Tony decided, *“Yeah, okay. Here’s what’s going to happen. Happy will be by to pick up the suit tomorrow, and I don’t care if the world is ending you will not go out until I return it to you. Do you understand?”*

Knowing it was pointless to argue Peter answered, “Yes, Mr. Stark.”

*“Okay then. In that case... let’s talk upgrades. How do you feel about an invisibility cloak?”*

A smile spread across Peter’s face where it stayed until the conversation ended nearly two hours later.

## **Dudes, Drinks, and Depression**

Peter was having a hard time figuring out why he was walking through the front door of the most popular guy in school's house on a Friday night. When Harry invited him earlier today he was excited and rambled on to Ned and MJ about it all through lunch.

Of course, they'd tried to talk him out of going, saying, "Why would he invite you to a party when he doesn't even know you?"

Peter had argued that "Maybe he's just trying to be nice."

Which was immediately countered with, "Why would he want to start now."

In the end, Peter dismissed their arguments and decided to go anyway, but standing there now, without any of his real friends, this seemed like a really bad idea.

Just as he was pulling out his phone to call May to come pick him up he felt a hand clasp around his shoulder.

Following the hand up, Peter's brown eyes met the crystal blue ones of Harry Osborn, the guy who's party he was at.

Mind scrambling for an excuse as to why he needed to leave Peter was left in stunned silence when Harry said with a smile, "Peter right? Glad you could make it."

Peter's stuttered reply only caused the older teen to laugh and jerk his head towards what Peter had guessed was the kitchen, "Come on, I know what will loosen you up."

Not having much choice but to follow because of the hand that was now resting on his lower back Peter found himself in the kitchen with a drink shoved into his hand, “What is it?”

“Drink and find out.”

Considering the amber liquid, Peter decided why not, it probably wouldn’t affect him anyway, so he raised the glass and took a drink way bigger than he should have. Instantly he was cringing at the bitter taste, which sent Harry into a fit of laughter, “Oh man your face was priceless! Guess that was your first drink huh?”

Peter didn’t answer, and instead asked, “Now will you tell me what it is?”

“Sweet tea and vodka.”

Making a face Peter questioned, “What’d you just mix whatever you could find?”

Shrugging Harry answered, “Eh told my parents I was throwing a party. Mom made sweet tea, dad bought me vodka, and I made it work. I didn’t realize you were such the alcohol connoisseur.”

Harry was pretty nice, and Peter felt himself start to loosen up, “You have your hobbies, I have mine.”

Chuckling Harry placed his hand back on Peter’s shoulder, “When you’ve drained that come out to the pool, we’re playing sip, sip, shot.” Then he was gone disappearing through the crowd of people.

Peter glanced back down at the amber liquid sloshing around in his cup. Trying to make his decision, he glanced from where Harry had disappeared to, to the front door that would provide his escape, as he tried to figure out what he should do.

No, no, he knew what he *should* do, the fact that he was already feeling lightheaded and, though he’d never drank before, he knew that little amount of alcohol wasn’t supposed to affect anyone that quickly, told him that much.

The question he was asking himself was what did he *want* to do. The same fuzzy feeling that told him he should leave was what was making him want to stay.

Though he hadn't told anyone, not even his aunt, lately he'd been feeling like the world was crashing down around him. Every time he closed his eyes he'd see his parents disappearing, then Ben was... then Ben was gone too, then he was Spider-man, and everything was great, until it wasn't because he was falling and drowning and he couldn't escape, and when he finally came up for air the building was coming down and he just... he just couldn't handle it, and if a little teenage rebellion was what it took to forget, so be it. With that he downed the rest of the concoction and headed out to the pool.

Coming out a set of sliding glass doors was a massive pool, and next to it about 20 teens sitting in a circle. Oddly enough Peter didn't feel a bit nervous or awkward approaching the group. Strange, it was like his body absorbed the alcohol faster but wasn't getting rid of it. He'd have to brainstorm with Ned when he wasn't feeling so floaty.

When Harry saw Peter making his way over he made room for him to sit and waved him over. After Peter had plopped down crisscross in the circle of teenagers, Harry asked him, "You know how to play?"

"Do you really need to ask?"

"Fair enough. Basically it's duck, duck, goose, but if you're a duck you take a sip of this," he handed him another cup full of the sweet tea vodka mix, "and if you're a goose you still chase them around, but if you don't catch them you do a shot of that," he pointed to the middle where shot glasses filled with straight vodka sat, "Same goes for them if you do catch them."

Nodding in understanding Peter sat his cup in front of him like everyone else had done.

"Okay then, you in?"

"Well, I'm not sitting here for the view."

Harry smirked, "Right. Who wants to start..."

Not even half an hour later the game had ended when some guy named Trevor fell in the pool and



most everyone followed in behind him. Peter was about to take a dive himself when Harry pulled him over to a couch that had somehow made its way outside.

Not having much choice but to follow, Peter flopped dramatically on the expensive leather. Or he tried to flop down dramatically, he nearly missed the cushions and had to rely on Harry to keep him from hitting the ground.

When he'd finally gotten settled Harry was laughing and couldn't help commenting, "You're kind of a light weight man."

"You're a light weight."

"Yeah, I'm not the one slurring my words."

"S'not fair. You cheated."

Harry's eyebrows furrowed, but he was quick to cover his shock with a smile, "I don't think you can cheat at a drinking game, Pete."

"Can if there s'not vodka in your iced tea and vodka."

Peter wasn't able to catch Harry's defense because he was distracted with the whole new spectrum of color that seemed to have lit up before his eyes.

Reaching a hand up to swat at the new color Peter decided to name it Shwars. Wait, that seems familiar. Don't the German's already have that color? You know it's really not fair that the Germans get more colors than everyone else. That has to be like racist or something.

"No Peter, I'm pretty sure Germans have the same colors as we do."

Whoa!! How cool was this guy, first he has a hot tub and now he can read minds!

"I can't read minds, Pete, you're talking out loud."

No, that couldn't be right, surely Peter would know if he was talking out loud.

“Wow, you really are extremely wasted. Probably won't remember a thing in the morning.”

When Peter didn't reply, apparently gaining some control over his mouth, Harry moved on to the point of why he was there, “So, I heard you work for Tony Stark, that's gotta be pretty sweet!” After Peter had hummed his response Harry continued, “I wish I had a job that awesome. I can't even imagine all the cool stuff you see. Say, can you tell me about some of the things you've worked on?”

Once again Peter wasn't paying attention so Harry snapped his fingers in his face and asked, “Peter?” Man, this kid is a spacey drunk.

“Mmm, I don't think I'm s'posed to talk 'bout it.”

Sighing Harry coaxed, “That's too bad. I would kill to see what goes on in that lab.”

His eyes lighting up, Peter jumped into a ramble, “Oh! Oh you mean lab 'tuff. It's awesome! Mr. Stark let me help him experiment with the formula for resealing polymers, and...”

Pulling out his phone Harry began taking notes on what the kid was spewing. He'd hit a gold mine of ideas for his dad to steal later and was so getting that Valkyrie he'd had his eye on.

After the younger teen's ramble stopped Harry commented, “That's soo cool! I would love to be able to talk to 'Mr. Stark.'” He'd said it more as a filler hoping the kid would jump back into his ramble, and what happened next was definitely not what he had had in mind.

Excitement glazing over his features Peter offered, “I have his number. We can call 'im.” Reaching into his pocket, Peter produced his phone, dialed, and shoved it into Harry's hand before he could even protest.

The phone rang and rang, and rang, and rang some more, and relief was calming Harry's heartbeat when there was an answer, “*Kid for the millionth time you can call me all you want but it won't speed anything up.*”

“Um... Hi?”

Instantly the fond annoyance drained from Tony’s voice to be replaced with a cold, demanding tone, *“Who are you and why do you have this phone?”*

“I’m a friend.”

*“Okay ‘friend’ give the phone to back to Peter.”*

Harry obediently and gratefully handed the phone back to Peter who was rolling his eyes.

“Hey, Mr. Stark.” He did a surprisingly good job at not slurring.

*“Don’t ‘hey’ me kid. I’m not a damn party trick you can use to impress your friends.”*

“S’rry Mr. Stark.”

There was a beat of silence before, “Say that again.”

“Say what ‘gain.”

*“Are you drunk!?”*

“Define drunk.”

*“affected by alcohol to the extent of losing control of one’s faculties or behavior.”*

Peter swallowed hard, “Can you use it in a sentence?”

*"If Peter Parker is drunk I'm going to kick his ass into next week. No, actually I'm going to tell his hot aunt and let her kick his ass into the new year."*

"Uh, place of origin?"

*"Germa... Oh for the love of God why are we still doing this."*

Stark had lost Peter with that conversation as he jump-started a new one, "Germany! Did you know they have extra colors!" The next part was mumbled, "Stingy bastards won't share though."

*"What the hell are you talking about?"*

"S'not fair, I really like gelb."

His voice sounded so much like a child that it made Tony's heart physically hurt, or maybe that was the massive stroke that Peter was bound to give him at some point. *"Listen kid, I don't know what you're talking about, but how about you tell me where you are so I can come pick you up."*

"But I don' wanna leave."

*"And I don't want to spend the night making sure you don't drown in your own vomit, but we don't always get what we want."* Peter stayed silent so Stark continued, *"Come on Peter, just tell me whose house you're at. You know I'll find you one way or another."*

Sighing, Peter replied, "Harry Osborn." He was getting tired anyway.

*"Osborn."* Tony echoed incredulously. Of course if Peter was going to go off and get drunk it would be at his rivals place. *"Alright, hang tight kid, I'll be there in five."*

Peter had completely missed that part though as he was slumped over, passed out, with his phone still clutched tightly in his hand.

## **At the End of that Dead End Road**

Tony had been having one of those days where it feels like you just can't catch a break. Secretary Ross is all over his ass to get 'team Cap' as he heard the media call them, to sign the revised Accords. You'd think the guy learned his lesson after everything that had happened last time, but apparently Tony gives him too much credit.

After diffusing that bomb, another call came in, and apparently, something massive was spotted making its way towards Earth. They were still unsure of who or what it was, but it was powerful, so you know that's going to be fun.

And on top of all of that, Oscorp just released a brand of plastics that, after being broken or ripped, could meld itself back together. It was clearly Tony's formula, but that didn't bother him so much, he'd found that with that particular formula ten days after the resealant had been initiated the whole thing melted down into an acidic paste. No, what was bothering him was how they got their hands on his formula. He has a feeling it has to do with a certain 15-year-old and man if that thought didn't make him want to lay that snooty Osborn kid out.

Dwelling on that seemed pointless and brought him way too close to admitting something he wasn't sure he was ready to admit, so instead here he was at four a.m., music blasting, tinkering with whatever he can find that needs tinkering.

It was because of this that when his phone rang Tony didn't answer.

~~~

Peter wasn't sure how it got this bad. Sure he'd been pretty down on himself and the thought had crossed his mind enough that he'd become pretty reckless as Spider-man, but he hadn't ever thought he could carry it through. Not until now anyway.

Something about standing up here approximately 400 feet above the rough, rushing water of the East River, warm wind whipping around him and causing the ends of his hair to tickle against his neck, it seemed... peaceful.

Closing his eyes he cherished the feeling of the breeze wrapping itself around him. He didn't get to enjoy the feeling long before a siren interrupted him coming from the Bronx side of the bridge. The sirens paired with the slight smell of smoke made it easy to know what happened. There was a fire and if he didn't go help people could die.

Instead, he sat down because it wasn't Spider-man that had brought him up here web-slinging after some bad guy, it was Peter Parker, feeling broken and useless.

Sighing softly to himself he hung his head and tried to tune out the sirens, tried to ignore the guilt slinking its way through his mind at the thought of the people and their families that could be hurt because of him, tried to forget the people who had already been hurt...

Slamming the heel of his foot into the unforgiving steel of the bridge as a distraction from his thoughts, he watched small flakes of paint float down to the wild waters below, imagining himself drifting after them.

Closing his eyes against the swell of... sadness? Depression? Heart-wrenching anguish? There didn't seem to be a proper way to describe it. He tried to steady his erratic heart, tried to calm his racing mind, but he just couldn't. God had he tried. Everything from meditating, to punching bad guys, to the angry red lines that stood out like neon on his pale wrists, but nothing seemed to appease the demons running circles through his thoughts.

Glancing at his wrists he brought his left hand over and lightly traced the cuts, surprised they hadn't healed over yet. Probably because he hasn't been eating.

With another sigh, he laid on his back and looked up at the stars dreaming of a different life. One

where his parents weren't gone and would ask him how his day was at the dinner table every night. One where Ben hadn't been killed and they could still sneak out to watch horror movies when May was 'asleep' even though she always knew. He dreamed of a life where he didn't disappoint Mr. Stark daily, or flake on Ned, or completely ruin Liz's life. One where he was better and didn't hurt everyone he came in contact with.

A single tear rolled down his cheek and slipped off his face causing him to sit up and angrily wipe it away.

He didn't deserve to feel like this. So many people are going through the same thing, so many people had it ten times worse, yet here he was feeling sorry for himself. A humorless chuckle slipped past his chapped lips, "Fuck I'm an idiot."

For Christ's sake, what was he doing, he's Spider-man. Would Ironman ever be found acting like a petulant child crying about his issues on some bridge? Doubtful, and he at least had acceptable stuff to be upset about. Here Peter was sniveling about being all alone when Mr. Stark had just lost some of his closest friends. And sure they seemed fine last time he saw, but things like that don't usually go away that easy. Maybe Mr. Stark needed someone to talk to as much as Peter did.

Still eager for a distraction, the teen fished his phone out of his hoodies' front pocket with shaky hands.

Fiddling with the too large sleeves, he listened to it ring and ring until it finally went to voicemail. Usually, he'd hang up and dial again until his mentor answered, but the last thing he wanted to do right now was bother the older man so he opted to leave a message instead,

"Hey, Mr. Stark!" He forced his usual cheer to the surface, "I know you're probably super busy with something way too important for me to even think about but... well actually given that it's 4 a.m. you're probably asleep. At least you should be, but who am I to say that," Shrugging even though it wouldn't be seen Peter struggled to keep up his childish ramble, "Anyway I was just thinking maybe you needed someone to talk to or something cause..." His voice hitched and he cleared his throat with the intent of continuing, but instead let himself trail off. Why would Mr. Stark ever want to talk to him, he was just some annoying, ignorant kid who talked too much and practically stalked the poor man.

Trying not to sound as dejected as he felt the teen apologized, "Actually... I'm sorry, I know you don't have time for me, especially at the butt crack of dawn," His chuckle sounded pathetic and forced even to him, "umm, so yeah I'll uh leave you alone I guess. This is Peter... Parker, bye."



Pulling his phone away the teen set it next to him and looked back up to the sky trying to hold back the well of tears.

This sucks. Why couldn't he ever be good enough? If only he'd been better maybe his parents wouldn't have gotten on that plane to begin with, or Ben wouldn't have been killed because he took him to that ice cream shop so he'd quit crying, or May wouldn't be so far in debt she has to work 12 hours, 6 days a week, or Tony... well isn't that a long list of screw-ups.

He slammed his foot back against the bridge feeling something snap but ignoring the pain to focus back on the river rushing below.

Maybe it would just be better if he was gone. May wouldn't have to worry about paying for school, clothes, extra food, or anything else he burdened her with, Mr. Stark wouldn't have to waste his time chaperoning some random kid off the streets, and his friends would be 100 times safer without Spider-man attracting every other bad guy to their school.

Some part of his mind tells him he's wrong. That May would be devastated to lose the only family she has, that he isn't just some random kid to Mr. Stark, not anymore, and that Ned, and even MJ, would miss him like crazy, but he chooses to ignore it as he realizes he wants this.

He wants Mr. Stark to get his call and come catch him, tell him everything was going to be all right, that he mattered. He wants to see the tears in May's eyes as she crushes him into her chest and tell him to never scare her like that again. He wants people to know, to care.

Maybe that makes him a bad person, selfish really, but as he slides his small body over the edge with a soft, "Goodbye," he realizes,

Maybe, for once, he just doesn't care.

## Glad you Called

*“Boss, Ms. Potts is requesting your presence in your bedroom. She claims it is an emergency though I do not detect any distress.”*

Tony looks up from his newest project if Pepper was having F.R.I.D.A.Y. call him rather than getting him herself then it must really be getting late.

Glancing at the clock that Peter had designed to never die or get off on time he read 4:23. Really the clock wasn't necessary, F.R.I.D.A.Y. was capable of the exact same thing, hell a smartphone could manage that, but after seeing the proud smile that spread across the kids face when he first placed it on the wall as a joke he'd be damned if that thing ever came down.

He did have to admit, the power source on that thing was pretty genius. It was like a smaller, less explosive version of an arc reactor.

Pushing back the stool he had been sitting in he rolled his neck to get the creaks out and told F.R.I.D.A.Y., “Tell her I'm on my way, but patience is a virtue.”

The AI was silent for a bit before delivering Pepper's answer, *“She says that your love life will have to be very patient if you don't get your a...”*

“Message delivered, thanks, F.R.I.D.A.Y.,” he cut off with a chuff.

Tony grabbed his phone off the table as F.R.I.D.A.Y. replied, *"No problem boss."*

As he went to turn off the music that was still blasting through his phone, he noticed that there was a little timer flashing across the top of his screen.

**02:57**

**02:58**

**02:59**

**03:00**

**03:01**

Looking up to no one in particular the genius asked, "What's this Fri?"

*"Protocol does not permit me to terminate voicemails for certain individuals. Would you like me to list the people?"*

Shaking his head as unease began stirring deep in his chest he responded, "No, just tell me whose message this is."

*"Peter Parker's sir."*

Jaw clenched the billionaire demanded, "Play it."

*"Of course sir from the beginning?"*

Before Stark even replied the kid's voice was blasting through the speakers of the lab.

*"Hey, Mr. Stark!"*

The dread started unraveling a little. Sure his voice sounded a little off, but judging by the sound of the wind blowing through the speakers, the kid had to be pretty high up and, though Peter would

never admit it, Tony had noticed that he had some trouble with heights.

*"I know you're probably super busy with something waaay too important for me to even think about but... well actually given that it's 4 a.m. you're probably asleep. At least you should be, but who am I to say that."*

Tony could practically hear the shrug through the phone and shook his head at Peter's rambling. He laughed lightly at the thought that maybe the kid had just been rambling on about nothing for the last four minutes and he had been worried about nothing.

After a short pause Peter continued at a slightly slower pace, *"Anyway, I was just thinking maybe you needed someone to talk to or something cause..."* His voiced hitched for a minute before he picked back up without the cheer that always seemed to be laced through his words, *"Actually..."* Another hitch like he was trying not to cry, *"I'm sorry, I know you don't have time for me, especially at the butt crack of dawn,"* The joke was lost with the very weak and very forced laugh that followed. *"Umm, so yeah I'll uh leave you alone I guess. This is Peter... Parker, bye."*

There was a small thump like the kid had set his phone down without thinking to end the call first and Tony was left just listening to the sound of wind in confusion.

At the beginning of the call everything seemed fine, but then... Well, even without everything else, the fact that the kid had felt the need to leave his full name, like Tony wouldn't have recognized him otherwise, caused the older man's heart to ache.

*I know you don't have time for me*

How could he possibly believe that Tony wouldn't drop everything if he asked him to? Maybe he wasn't as good with the kid as he thought. With how much of a train wreck his relationship with his own father was it shouldn't be surprising that he managed to fuck up whatever kind of weird father/son thing that had developed between the two heroes.

Sighing the genius decided that he had to fix this, and he'd start by picking Peter up from school the next day, or that was what he decided before a soft and final, *"Goodbye,"* sounded through the speakers. Then the sound of wind was the only thing heard across the line.

*"That is the last thing Mr. Parker says. Would you like me to end the playback?"*

"What just happened?"

*“I have removed the wind and detected a very light splash 5.02 seconds after Mr. Parker’s last word. Due to this, I would hypothesize that Mr. Parker has fallen approximately 400ft. into a large body of water. Would you like me to end the playback?”*

“Send me his coordinates.”

*“Already done sir. Would you like me to...”* But Tony was already running through the halls of the too large complex calling his suit and blasting towards the Whitestone bridge.

When he arrived at the bridge he landed on the massive arch where F.R.I.D.A.Y. had located Peter’s phone. Casting his gaze towards the crashing water below Stark pleaded, “Find him.”

...

...

...

*“Heat signature detected.”*

“Thank God,” with that the billionaire was blasting into the water after Peter’s unconscious form for the second time this month.

As his vision blackened and switched to an ominous shade of green, Tony searched for the sinking teen. Catching a flash of movement from the corner of his eye, he dived lower and had the boy wrapped in his arms and was shooting back out of the freezing river within seconds.

Reaching the nearest shore, Tony gently laid the kid’s still form on the rocky sand. After dismantling his suit he knelt anxiously next to Peter and gently pulled him onto his lap while his fingers searched frantically for a pulse.

Finding one, however weak, helped to slightly release the building pressure that felt like it was collapsing his chest and Stark moved to check his breathing. Expectedly the teen wasn’t breathing at all, so without a second thought the mechanic tipped the kid’s head back and began rescue breaths.

A breath

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

A breath

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

A breath

Over and over until with a harsh cough, Peter's eyes shot open and diluted water spilled from his blueing lips.

Tony rolled him on his side and rubbed his back soothingly as ~~his~~ the boy, continued to hack up the water that had filled his lungs, "It's okay, I got you... shh, you're alright, I'm here," repeated like a mantra over and over until with a shaky exhale Peter rolled himself back on his back and closed his eyes.

Tapping his face gently, Tony practically whispered, "Hey, you have to keep your eyes open okay?" when the kid didn't immediately respond he begged, "Please, Peter... please."

When the kid grudgingly complied he immediately flinched and croaked out in a raspy, raw voice, "Tss too bright."

Confused Tony glanced around at their near pitch black surroundings, but nevertheless, he tenderly repositioned Peter so he was back on his lap but could now bury his face into the greasy t-shirt he hadn't had time to change.

When the teen whimpered in response, Tony demanded, “F.R.I.D.A.Y., scan for injuries.”

*“Comminuted fracture calcaneus, infractioned left tibia and fibula, fractured patella, lacerations on the wrist and thigh, a severe concussion, and he is showing early signs of hypothermia.”*

“That’s great... now in English please.”

*“Of course sir, fractured heel, leg, and kneecap, multiple cuts on his wrists and thighs, head trauma, and he is starting to freeze. May I suggest first getting him warm and then treating his concussion as these are both potentially life-threatening injuries.”*

Glancing worriedly at the injured teen Tony asked, “Will it be okay to move him.”

Peter shook his head and mumbled, “Don’ wanna leave,” at the same time F.R.I.D.A.Y. responded, *“That would seem to be the best course of action, yes.”*

“Okay then, sorry buddy, but we have to get you some help,” slipping the teenager carefully off his lap, he laid him down while he put the metal suit on before returning to scoop Peter back up in his arms bridal style.

Blasting off, Tony did the best he could to be gentle with the injured kid who had his face buried in his metal chest. They hadn’t gotten far when Peter started mumbling incoherently.

“What was that?”

Chestnut eyes met his as Peter sniffed, “M’mm sorry.”

Gripping him tighter Tony answered, “You have nothing to be sorry for if anything I should be the one apologizing.”

The teen shook his head, “No, M’mm sorry... m’mm sorry.”

Worry building like bricks on his heart the older man conceded, “Okay Peter it’s okay. How about

we talk about this later.”

Peter didn't seem to listen as he continued, “M' mm sorry Mr. Stark. Sorry it... sorry it wasn... wasn't high enough.”

Having no idea how to respond to that, Tony gripped him tight enough that nothing in the world would have been able to make him let the child go, and pushed his thrusters even faster towards the compound.

~~~

The first things Peter took notice of when he woke up was the loud, obnoxious beeping, and the equally as loud but slightly less annoying snoring that he could recognize anywhere as Aunt May. The second was the death grip she had on his hand and the very noisy argument that was taking place between a certain billionaire genius and what he would guess was some kind of doctor or nurse.

Peeling his eyes open, he was immediately met with a painfully bright light and quickly squeezed his eyes back shut. Doing this he must have made some sort of whimper because one second May was snoozing on his arm, and the next she was leaning over him fully awake and very concerned.

Trying his best for a reassuring smile he croaked out, “Hey.”

Whispering more to herself than to her nephew May mumbled, “Oh thank God!” and threw herself on top of him squeezing him tight enough you might think she was the one with super strength.

“Okay May you can relax, it's not like I almost died or anything.”

Before the teen could blink, seriously it was like everything but him had been sped up, May was shooting him a disapproving look that could make Loki feel guilty, “Don't you dare joke about that Peter. When I...” she cuts off to take a deep breath, “When I heard what happened I thought I'd lose you too. You know you're all I have left, I don't think I could have survived.”

Hanging his head the teen apologized, “I know, I'm sorry,” there was a beat of silence as he tried to voice what was going through his mind, “But it helps to joke, makes it not as scary.”

This caused May to smile and run a hand through his hair, “Your mother used to do the same thing. Said if you could joke about it then you could overcome it. I see more and more of her in you



every day you know.”

Peter smiled relaxing into her touch, “Mmm, tell me about them.” May almost never talked about his parents, and usually, he was fine with not bringing it up, but he couldn’t say he wasn’t curious. Google searches and newspaper articles couldn’t tell you the meaningful stuff like how they relieved stress after a long day of work or what their favorite genre of music was. It could tell you a lot, but not who they really were.

Smiling at the memories the older woman began, “Your mother was the kindest most gorgeous person I’ve ever met. She’d have given anything and everything if she thought it would help someone else. And Richard, well he was the perfect counterbalance. Where she was a dreamer he was logical. It’s why they did so well together. She had the plans and he put them into action. I’ve always believed they could have conquered the world together.

You’re so much like them and... and Ben. I see it more and more every day. You know, when Ben first held you he cried,” she chuckled at the memory, “I don’t mean like a few manly tears either, he was so happy he just started bawling. Then Mary started crying, him and her were so alike you’d almost think they were the ones related. And eventually, I couldn’t hold it in any longer either. So, there we were all crying over this beautiful tiny thing, but not you. Even as a baby you’d throw on that brave face, never let anyone see when you were afraid.”

A knock sounded on the door before it swung open and Tony came in to stand a few feet away from the end of the bed, “Hey, kiddo.”

Not being able to meet his sad eyes, Peter focused his attention on the white blanket.

May took that as her cue and pushed back from her chair, “I’m gonna make a coffee run. You want anything, Tony?”

“No thanks.”

After she left, Mr. Stark made his way to the now unoccupied chair next to the bed and asked, “How you holding up?”

Finally meeting his eyes the teen let out a humorless chuff, “I’d be a lot better if you weren’t looking at me like I was made of glass.”

“Not glass, more like porcelain, or a super mushy brownie, you know like when they weren’t done cooking and you try to pull it out just for the whole thing to crumble.”

The teen smiled, “Wow, you must have read a book on how to increase someone's self-esteem. Step on: Compare them to an undercooked dessert.”

“A delicious undercooked dessert though, and I’ll have you know I’m a skilled expert on feelings and all that.”

“Uh-huh,” the teen mocked, “sure you are.”

“Should I be offended that you don’t believe me,” when Peter only answered with an eye roll Tony continued, “Well that decides it then, I’m offended.”

The kid couldn’t help but laugh at his mentor’s pout, with his arms crossed and his lips pursed, Mr. Stark looked like a child.

When his chuckles dried up, Tony leaned forward and asked in all seriousness, “Really though, how are you.”

“Fine.”

The older shook his head at the teen's curt response, “That’s a lie and we both know it. Sooner or later we’re going to have to talk about it.”

Shrugging Peter looked back down at the blanket, “I don’t see why.”

“Because you need to know how important you are to everyone around you. May would give you the world if she thought that would make you happy, your little friends, Ned and MJ, they’ve been calling almost nonstop for the past three hours, Happy may not seem like he cares, but who do you think is standing outside the door as a ‘guard’, don’t ask me what he’s guarding against, but he’s here, and so am I, and if you think that you could leave and I’d just continue on like nothing happened then you really haven’t been paying attention because you are without a doubt the best thing that could’ve ever happened to me. I need you to see how much your life matters. Do you understand.”

Nodding, a tear rolled down Peter's face as he whispered, "Yeah, I'm sorry."

"Me too kid," Tony leaned forward and grabbed ahold of his hand, "me too."

~~~

*A few weeks later.*

"You know Mr. Stark this isn't necessary. Really I'm fine."

Shaking his head and urging the ambient teen towards the closed doors at the end of the hall Tony replied sarcastically, "Yeah 'fine' people don't usually throw themselves head first off a bridge."

At the kid's flinch, Tony apologized but Peter just shrugged and said, "It's fine, but technically I did go feet first, like uh pencil," and he continued to practically skip down the hall after his mentor.

Rolling his eyes, Tony stopped at the door and asked, "You ready kid." Smiling at the kid's eager nod the billionaire threw open the doors revealing a 'glad you're okay and not a pancake floating down the Manhattan River' party as the handmade banner so crudely put it.

Actually, Tony found the whole thing pretty cringy if he was honest, but May thought Peter would prefer a small, cheap, and more wholesome gesture than something outrageous and pricy like Tony had planned, and judging from the kid's grin, she'd been right. Not that he had questioned it but well... other than the banner there was a cake that was premade from Kroger, a few balloons that were laying on the ground because they'd been blown up by hand rather than with helium, and the Avengers, plus May, sat around a table with Clint and Thor wearing party hats that the others had apparently refused.

Placing a hand on the small of Peter's back, Tony led him into the room as Steve smiled and said, "Welcome to the family Spider-man."

Clint chimed in, "About time we get someone who doesn't have a stick shoved so far up their butt that they forgot what a joke was."

Tony's reply was cut off as Peter threw his arms around his waist,

“Thank you so much...” and then, without a pause, or any kind of hesitation, nervousness, or regret the kid finished, “I love you Mr. Stark.”

Looking down at this too pure for the world teen, Tony was confronted with exactly what he had been worrying about since he first met him.

“It’s Tony,” wrapping his arms around the smaller he continued, “and I love you too.”

The End! :D



**Peter likes to talk and  
who better to call then  
Tony Stark**

**or**

**5 times Tony wished he  
hadn't answered Peter's  
call and the 1 time he  
wished he would have.**